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ABSTRACT

Frequent use of credibility phrases such as "to be perfectly honest" and "frankly speaking" may lend credence to the description of this era as being the Age of Disbelief. It is not enough that truth is implied in a discussion, it must be made explicit verbally. What do students think when they see headlines that decry fraud, deception, and phoniness? One can only wonder if dishonest attitudes are being conveyed in the classroom by teachers. Perhaps it is time to include exercises in truthfulness as a valued component of the curriculum and to take a hard look at ethics. It may be helpful to think of objectives or competencies for a truthful individual such as: The individual is faithful to commitments, is able to separate facts from irrelevancies, expresses integrity, is honest with himself and others, is trustworthy, seeks to be precise in speaking, and is accurate in written work. Truthfulness as a criterion can help students think about today's concerns and the responsibilities that people have toward others. This paper concludes with a list of 25 starter strategies for stressing truthfulness in the curriculum. (DC)

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Truthfulness In The Curriculum: A Case For Including Ethics

Dr. Leonore W. Dickmann

"Knowledge in truth is the great sun in the firmament. Life and power are scattered with all its beams." So stated Daniel Webster.

If he were to return today, would he find sunshine? Would conversations appear sunny to him that included the following words from his dictionary as precursors for additional conversation:

- To be honest with you . . .
- To be perfectly honest . . .
- Honestly speaking . . .
- To be frank about this . . .
- Frankly speaking . . .
- To tell the truth . . .
- Truthfully, . . .
- Rightly speaking . . .
- Truly, . . .
- In truth . . .
- Trust me, trust me . . .

The frequency in usage of these credibility phrases may lend some credence to the description for this time in history as the Age of Disbelief. It seems that it is not enough that truth is simply implied in discussions but that warrantees of truthfulness must be made explicit verbally.

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What do students think when they see headlines that decry fraud, deception, and phoniness? How do they reconcile articles on "truth in advertising," "problems of bioethics in medical schools," and "sharp practices in the business world?" How are they to interpret surveys in which teachers who were young, old, non-tenured, tenured, non-union, and union, when asked their views concerning ethics in education, with but one exception, agreed that it is not too smart to be honest? (Berger)

One can only wonder if this attitude of the teachers is being conveyed in the classroom inadvertently, perhaps, unconsciously, or even with conscious intent. Are "sharp practices" espoused in the business colleges as some students aver?

How does that square with artists who hold that the responsibility of the arts is to tell as much truth of experience as possible? What about the poet who tries to distill a concise statement of truth, the cameraman who tries to capture a moment of truth in time, or the portrait painter who struggles to portray a truthful representation of a subject?

What is the responsibility of the adult to the young learner to share information concerning a phenomenon of today's society - stress and burnout - which suggests that evasion of truth not only cripples integrity but can actually cause stress leading to burnout?

Sigmund Freud stated, "Being entirely honest with oneself is a good exercise." Perhaps, it's time to "exercise" not only physically but include exercises in truthfulness as a valued component of the

curriculum. It may be time to take a hard look at ethics rather than the soft look included in off-hand discussions of "situational" ethics that too many feel too comfortable with thereby excusing everything from the "white" lie, to saying "there are times one just can't tell the truth anymore," and even "it's all right to evade telling the truth as long as a mental reservation is made." The argument is that "it all depends on the situation."

One could question the lack of discipline this implies. Dr. M. Scott Peck has suggested four tools for establishing constructive discipline in one's life: delaying of gratification, acceptance of responsibility, dedication to truth, and balancing." (Peck)

In valuing "dedication to truth," it may be helpful to think of objectives or competencies for a truthful individual such as:

- The individual is faithful to commitments
- The individual is able to separate facts from irrelevancies
- The individual expresses integrity
- The individual is honest with himself and others
- The individual is trustworthy
- The individual seeks to be precise in speaking
- The individual is accurate in written work

Ethical behavior has become a national issue of growing importance. It may be that questions of ethics have been pushed aside in the curriculum. With the growing complexities in society, it may be time to include truthfulness in the curriculum as a focus for observation,

exploration, and study in order to help students confront the difficult questions, problems, and dilemmas they encounter.

Truthfulness as a criterion can help students think critically about today's concerns such as these:

- When does an employee "blow the whistle?"
- Should a public official ever tell an untruth?
- May parents ever lie to their children?
- Should children withhold information from parents and/or adults in a helping role?
- When might a lawyer reveal facts harmful to a client?
- May a journalist ever break confidentiality of sources.

Educators willing to include ethics in the curriculum may realize that they have support from Chief Justice Berger who spoke, "We have virtually eliminated from public schools . . . any effort to teach values of integrity, truth, personal accountability and respect for others' rights." He was noting recent crime figures and advocating emphasis on these basics in education for character development.

Teachers who plan learning activities to embrace truthfulness as a value may say with Albert Schweitzer, "Truth has no special hour of its own. Its hour is now - always."

25 Starter Strategies For Stressing Truthfulness In The Curriculum

- Brainstorm synonyms for truthfulness.
- Look up definitions for synonyms in the dictionary.
- Check attributes of a truthful person such as:
    - precise
    - candid
    - authentic
    - sincere
    - perfect
    - factual
    - honest
- Discuss ethical questions such as:
    - When does an employee "blow the whistle?"
    - Should a public official ever tell an untruth?
    - May parents ever lie to their children?
    - Should children withhold information from parents and/or adults in a helping role?
    - When might a lawyer reveal facts harmful to a client?
    - May a journalist ever break confidentiality of sources?
- Contrast antonyms for truthfulness.
- Stress precision in mathematics.
- Point out the need for perfection in spelling.
- Reflect on what it means to be authentic.
- Discuss why factual information is crucial.

- Talk about honesty in reporting.
- Think about the meaning of sincerity in relationships.
- Question the meaning of being candid with one another.
- Collect quotations that highlight truthfulness or its synonyms and attributes.
- Use quotations as a basis for written commentary.
- Start a learning activity with discussion of a quotation collected.
- Use an ethical question in socio-drama.
- Create posters that underscore truthfulness.
- Compile poems with a truthfulness theme.
- Write original poems on truthfulness.
- Locate stories with truthfulness as a theme.
- Start a listing of people who stood for truthfulness.
- Write original stories on truthfulness
- Use the camera to capture moments of truthfulness to share.
- Reflect on the role of truthfulness in the arts.
- Check the media for articles on truthfulness or its opposite.

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